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ELECTRONIC COUPON ISSUING SYSTEM AND ISSUING METHOD

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a system and method for issuing electronically realized imaginary coupons, or so-called e-coupons.

2. Description of the Related Art

Retail discount coupons have previously existed on the internet for every kind of restaurant, retail store and the like. With these coupons, information downloaded via the internet is printed out and taken to the pertinent store, with the result that the prices of food, drinks, etc. are discounted and various kinds of benefits are obtained.

However, even though the information has been obtained via the internet, the discount or other benefits cannot be obtained if one forgets to take the printed coupon to the pertinent store. There is also the problem that the process itself of printing out the coupon is bothersome.

Also, it is difficult to collect usage information about coupons which have been used in this manner, so this is ineffective with respect to the goal of obtaining marketing information from the usage of coupons.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In light of these issues, the object of the present invention is to provide a system and a method for issuing an electronic coupon which omits the procedure of printing out the coupon, eliminates the bothersome aspect of having to take the printed coupon to the pertinent store, and can be used easily and conveniently.

In order to solve the above-mentioned problems, a first aspect of the present invention is an electronic coupon issuing system configured so as to enable a coupon reception counter to use an issued electronic coupon via any kind of coupon reception (or redemption) means, the electronic coupon issuing system characterized by comprising: an electronic coupon server having an electronic coupon generation approval registration means for registering information regarding approval of generation of the electronic coupon; an electronic coupon acquisition registration means for registering acquisition of the electronic coupon in association with ID information of an electronic coupon usage medium (or redemption medium) that is presented at the point of sale when the electronic coupon is used; and an electronic coupon search means of receiving identifying indicia such as the ID information of the electronic coupon usage medium and searching for an electronic coupon that is usable in connection with the ID information; and an electronic coupon reception (or redemption) terminal for receiving the electronic coupon usage medium (or redemption medium), inquiring with the electronic coupon search

means of the electronic coupon server whether an electronic coupon exists and at the same time approving the use of useable electronic coupons; wherein the electronic coupon acquisition registration means of the electronic coupon server receives a request for acquisition of an electronic coupon from an electronic coupon registration terminal and registers electronic coupon acquisition information in association with the ID information of the electronic coupon usage medium; and the electronic coupon search means receives the ID information of the electronic coupon medium and information regarding the usage objective which have been sent from the electronic coupon reception terminal; performs searches to determine whether or not an electronic coupon useable for the ID information and for the usage objective exists; and sends results from the search to the electronic coupon reception terminal.

In a second aspect of the present invention, according to a first aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing system is further characterized in that the electronic coupon server has an electronic coupon usage information accumulation means for accumulating the search results from the searches performed by the electronic coupon search means and accumulating electronic coupon usage information.

In a third aspect of the present invention, according to the first aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing system is further characterized in that the electronic coupon registration terminal is a mobile telephone or a computer which

is connected to a network, or a digital broadcast reception terminal.

In a fourth aspect of the present invention, according to the first aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing system is further characterized in that the electronic coupons used by the electronic coupon reception terminal are any of a variety of discount coupons, any of a variety of benefits, or any of a variety of tickets.

In a fifth aspect of the present invention, according to a first aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing system is further characterized in that the electronic coupon reception terminal has a function of printing out and using the electronic coupon.

In a sixth aspect of the present invention, according to a first aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing system is further characterized in that the electronic coupon reception terminal prints out the electronic coupon as a bar code and uses the bar code.

In a seventh aspect of the present invention, according to a first aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing system is further characterized in that the electronic coupon usage medium is a credit card, a debit card, any of a variety of point-accumulation cards or any of a variety of mileage accumulation cards.

In an eighth aspect of the present invention, according to the seventh aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon

issuing system is further characterized in that the electronic coupon usage medium is a credit card and the electronic coupon reception terminal serves also as a credit card settlement terminal, and the electronic coupon reception terminal is connected to the electronic coupon server via credit settlement center or via a relay center to a credit card settlement center.

In a ninth aspect of the present invention, according to an eighth aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing system is further characterized in that the electronic coupon reception terminal simultaneously dispatches a search for the electronic coupon and a request for approval for a credit card settlement, and when the electronic coupon is useable for a discount, the electronic coupon reception terminal sends out a second request for a credit settlement at a discounted price.

In a tenth aspect of the present invention, according to an eighth aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing system is further characterized in that the electronic coupon reception terminal and the credit card settlement center or relay center which relays to the credit card settlement center are connected wirelessly.

In an eleventh aspect of the present invention an electronic coupon issuing method is configured so as to enable a coupon reception counter to use an issued electronic coupon via any kind of coupon reception means, the electronic coupon issuing method being characterized by: registering approval information for generation of the electronic coupon; receiving a request for

acquisition of the electronic coupon and registering electronic coupon acquisition information in association with ID information of the electronic coupon usage medium; and, upon reception of the electronic coupon usage medium, performing a search to determine whether there exists an electronic coupon that makes the electronic coupon usage medium usable, and approving the use of the electronic coupon usage medium in the case that a usable electronic coupon exists.

In a twelfth aspect of the present invention, according to an eleventh aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing method is further characterized by accumulating electronic coupon usage information.

In a thirteenth aspect of the present invention, according to an eleventh aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing method is further characterized by registration of the electronic coupons being performed by a mobile telephone or a computer connected to a network, or by a digital broadcast reception terminal.

In a fourteenth aspect of the present invention, according to an eleventh aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing method is characterized in that the electronic coupon is any of a variety of discount coupons, benefits or tickets.

In a fifteenth aspect of the present invention, according to an eleventh aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon

issuing method is further characterized in that the electronic coupon is printed out and used.

In a sixteenth aspect of the present invention, according to a fifteenth aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing method is further characterized in that the electronic coupon is printed out and used as a bar code.

In a seventeenth aspect of the present invention, according to an eleventh aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing method is further characterized in that the electronic coupon usage medium is a credit card, debit card, any of a variety of point accumulation cards or any of a variety of mileage accumulation cards.

In a eighteenth aspect of the present invention, according to a seventeenth aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing method is further characterized in that the electronic coupon usage medium is a credit card and the credit card settlement terminal also serves to perform reception of the electronic coupon.

In a nineteenth aspect of the present invention, according to an eighteenth aspect of the invention, the electronic coupon issuing method is further characterized by performing the reception of the electronic coupons and the credit card settlement simultaneously, and performing the credit card settlement at a discounted price when an electronic coupon for a discount is usable.

According to the present invention, registered electronic coupons may be used simply by presenting an electronic coupon usage medium such as a credit card at the time of payment or at some other such moment, and eliminates the need for printing a coupon and taking it to the pertinent store. Also, there is an advantage in that information about acquisition and usage of such electronic coupons can easily be accumulated as a database, and is useful as information about the preferences of individuals, being extremely useful as a means for amassing marketing information.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the accompanying drawings:

FIG. 1 is a diagram of an outline construction of an example of an electronic coupon issuing system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a diagram of an example of electronic coupon generation approval information in accordance with the embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a diagram of an example of electronic coupon registration information in accordance with the embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a diagram of an example search performed by an electronic coupon search means in accordance with the embodiment of the present invention and results produced by the search;

FIG. 5 is a diagram of another example search performed by an electronic coupon search means in accordance with the embodiment of the present invention and results produced by the search;

FIG. 6 is a diagram of an example of a usage report for an electronic coupon in accordance with the embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 7 is a diagram of an outline construction of an example of a coupon issuing system in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 8 is a diagram of an outline construction of an example of a coupon issuing system in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Hereinafter, explanation will be made regarding embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 1 shows a schematic structure of an electronic coupon issuing system according to an embodiment. As shown in this drawing, an electronic coupon server 10 has an electronic coupon generation approval registration means 11 for registering information regarding approval of generation of the electronic coupon; an electronic coupon acquisition registration means 12 for registering acquisition the electronic coupon in association with ID information of an electronic coupon usage medium such as

a credit card that is presented when the electronic coupon is used; an electronic coupon search means 13 for receiving the ID information of the electronic coupon usage medium and searching for electronic coupon that is useable in connection with the ID information; and an electronic coupon usage information accumulation means 14 for accumulating search results from the search performed by the electronic coupon search means 13 and accumulating the use information of the electronic coupon. The electronic coupon server 10 is connected to an electronic coupon issuing center 21 and various types of electronic coupon reception terminals 22, and receives coupon acquisition requests from a variety of types of electronic coupon registration terminals 23.

The electronic coupon server 10 is the core of the issuing system for electronic coupons such as imaginary discount certificates and tickets being electronically realized. The electronic coupons are not just paper, but are registered as a form of information linked to an electronic coupon usage medium 32 such as a credit card.

Issuance of electronic coupons begins with a request to the electronic coupon issuing center 21 by an electronic coupon issuer 31 who wants to create publicity upon the issuing of the electronic coupon and wishes to amass market information.

The request from the electronic coupon issuer 31 includes information about what is to be used as the electronic coupon usage medium 32, what kind of electronic coupon is to be issued,

for what objective and the like. Depending upon the type of electronic usage medium, there can be multiple electronic coupon issuing centers.

As an example, in the case that a credit card is used as the electronic coupon usage medium 32 for issuing a discount coupon for a particular merchandise, information such as a code indicating the type of the credit card, the kinds of merchandise to which the electronic coupon is applicable, the discount rate, the expiration date of the coupon is necessary.

FIG. 2 shows an example of the electronic coupon generation approval information 41. In this case, electronic coupon generation approval information 41 (also referred to herein as coupon information) includes the electronic coupon ID and name, participating stores so as to specify the locations where the electronic coupon can be used, information about the merchandise to which the electronic coupon is applicable, the discount information offered by the electronic coupon, the expiration date of the coupon, etc.

This sort of necessary information is sent as electronic coupon generation approval information 41 to the electronic coupon server 10 from the electronic coupon issuing center 21, and is registered in an electronic coupon generation approval registration means 11.

The electronic coupon is generated by a consumer 33 using the electronic coupon registration terminal 23 and registering the electronic coupon.